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Empowering Rural Communities

Dear Fellow Arkansan,

This week, I [held my second hearing](#) on the 2012 Farm Bill. The hearing focused on the status and future of the Farm Bill's energy and rural development programs. Joining me to testify at the hearing were Arkansans General Wesley Clark; Dennis Sternberg, Executive Director of the Arkansas Rural Water Association; and JoAnne Bush, Mayor of the City of Lake Village.

As a farmer's daughter and a product of rural Arkansas, I am honored to chair the Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry. Arkansans know firsthand that rural America is often the first to feel the impact of economic downturns, and is often the last to reap the rewards of economic recoveries. The development and deployment of renewable sources of energy produced in rural America presents an opportunity to change that trend. It is critical that we are effectively utilizing every tool at our disposal to create jobs, put our economy back on track, and reduce our dangerous dependency on foreign oil.

The Farm Bill energy programs provide a model that should be the basis of our national energy policy. We need to develop biofuels and biomass energy policies that work for rural America. Our farmers, ranchers, and foresters are ready for the challenge. They are innovative and eager to expand their role to also provide an inexpensive, sustainable, and safe supply of renewable fuel and energy.

The Rural Development initiatives of the Farm Bill also contain a number of opportunities that provide our rural communities with the tools they need to thrive and create new jobs.

I have seen firsthand how critical Rural Development initiatives are to Arkansas's economy. Recently, I worked with USDA to secure \$55 million in funding to help the Ozark Mountain Public Water Authority in Arkansas provide safe, potable water to 22,000 residents in North Central Arkansas. In addition to providing residents with safe drinking water, the construction of this project will create nearly a thousand jobs in a part of the state that could desperately use them. Rural Development also offers several programs that are helping to create jobs by providing access to capital to rural small businesses.

As Chairman, nothing is more important to me than empowering our rural communities and ensuring that future generations have the opportunity to enjoy the quality of life rural America offers.

As always, please feel free to [contact me with your comments, suggestions and concerns](#). I look forward to hearing from you.

With Arkansas Pride,

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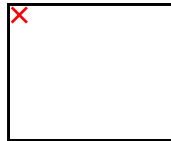
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